

EARLY ENGLISH BENCH END,

AYSARTH CHURCH, YORKSHIRE.

SECTION AT A.B.



EARLY ENGLISH WOODWORK.

AYSGARTH CHURCH, YORKSHIRE.

SIR,—In wandering a summer's day last month amidst the enchanting scenery of Wensleydale, in the West Riding of the county of York, I found myself towards evening at the pretty little village of Aysarth, celebrated by its proximity to the superb falls of the river Ure.

My custom is always, if practicable, to see the interior of a church, however humble its appearance, and in this instance my curiosity was well rewarded by the discovery of two early English bench ends, carved in oak, and somewhat like the accompanying drawing. I am not even a tolerable antiquary, but it struck me that in the numerous works on Gothic architecture that I had seen of late years, nothing approaching this interesting relic of early English woodwork had either been noticed or engraved; and viewing it in this light, I fancied that you might deem it worth a place in your interesting journal. Myself and an architectural friend examined them closely, and at once were satisfied that they were genuine examples, and not copies of old work, executed at some much later date.

The carving is characterised by the usual features so often met with in stonework of that date, conveying at once to the antiquary or architect an unmistakable signature of its date. The two elbows (both in a similar state of dilapidation) occupy the same position, i.e., at the end of the stall seats in the chancel, and stand on each side of the rood screen door, and abutting against it, as shown in the sketch.

The drawing will, I hope, clearly demonstrate that portion of the elbow at present existing. The dotted lines are intended to show my humble attempt at a restoration of the form it may have assumed when perfect. Both the sides are carved, and otherwise ornamented in a similar manner, though at present a board is nailed against the interior, causing me at first sight to imagine it only sunk carving, and not pierced. The design may be, I think, justly entitled to credit, and doubtless in those early times of scarce woodwork was considered as something first-rate.

Besides these interesting relics, the church contains much woodwork of a very ornate and splendid character. The roodloft (given in Whittaker's "Richmond-hire") is magnificent, and at the present day has its painting and gilding quite perfect; two perpendicular standards, most elaborately and exquisitely carved, make the finish to the front of the stalls, in the same manner as the bench ends do to the seats, and two chantry screens, of perpendicular date, are to be found in the chancel. One of them bears an inscription, giving the name and date of a certain Abbot of Jervaulx, and thus plainly indicating the history of so much sumptuous woodwork in so simple a village church.

Jervaulx Abbey is about nine miles distant, and contains amidst its ruins some valuable specimens of early English date, characterized more especially by the great elegance of its mouldings. The remains existing at the present day were founded about the end of the twelfth century.

Wensleydale, besides its well-known and unrivalled scenery, contains many examples of old English architecture, and will well repay the student or antiquary for two or three days' ramble.

Lancaster, July 30th.

* The elevation is on a scale of one inch to a foot: the section is half the real size.

THE ANTIQUARIAN RAMBLE IN WARWICKSHIRE.*

BRITISH ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION.

AT a short distance from Coventry, of which we have already spoken, is *Coombe Abbey*, the seat of Lord Craven, where the unfortunate Princess Elizabeth, daughter of James I., and afterwards Queen of Bohemia, passed the early part of her life. Howitt, in his "Visits to Remarkable Places," says, with some justice, that "Coombe Abbey has altogether that air and those vestiges of old times which must, independent of its connection with the Queen of Bohemia, give it great interest in the eyes of the lovers of old English homes, and of the

traces of past generations." So little care, however, seems employed to preserve consistency in the fittings and furniture of the rooms, that the pleasure which would otherwise be found in a ramble through it is materially lessened.

The architecture is of various character, much intermixed and disfigured by alterations at different periods. The cloisters of the abbey which once occupied the site, now included within the house, are Norman. The most interesting apartment, known as the Elizabethan room, completed in the reign of James I., and which formed part of the suite occupied by the princess, has a fine chimney-piece of the period, partly of wood, partly stone. In connection with this suite of rooms is the quaint and interesting garden porch, engraved in our last volume,* where will also be found an account of the Abbey.

There is a large number of paintings of various degrees of excellence, including the "Samuel and Eli," of Rembrandt,—a marvellous production, well worth a pilgrimage.

Amongst the other interesting old houses visited by the association was *Asley Cntrl*, the seat of Lord Lifford, originally a fortified erection of early date, but now for the most part modernized. Parts of the exterior, belonging to the time of the Tudors, retain their characteristics, and the most remains.

Asley Church, closely adjoining the residence, has several points of considerable interest. According to Dugdale, Sir Thomas de Asley built here in the fifteenth year of the reign of Edward III., "a most fair and beautiful collegiat church in the form of a cross, dedicated to the assumption of the blessed Virgin, with a tall spire, covered with lead." The spire being pulled down by an after owner, the tower decayed, and was rebuilt about 1607. At the same time was totally taken away "all the west part of the church, with the north and south cross isles, making that which was the quire the body of the church." They also pulled down the chapels, "setting up that which stood on the north side at the east end for a chancel." This agrees with the present arrangement of the church. The added chancel has upon the face of the masonry the date 1602, in large sculptured figures.

In the nave (formerly the chancel) is a series of eighteen canopied stalls, with a figure painted on the wall at the back of each, and a legend in a scroll.

A very short distance from Castle Asley stands *Arbury*, the beautiful seat of Mr. Newdegate Newdegate, M.P., who received the association with elegant hospitality. The drawing-room and dining-hall, in the late pointed style, are remarkable, if we were rightly informed, as having been executed from the drawings of an amateur, Sir Francis Newdegate, at a time when Gothic architecture was less understood than it is now. *Arbury* contains a number of very interesting pictures and portraits,† amongst which is the remarkable painting, or rather series of paintings, inscribed, "The combat in Paris betwixt John de Asley and Peter de Mape, 29th August, A.D. 1438," and "The Combat in Smithfield betwixt Sir John de Asley and Sir Philip Boyle, 30th January, A.D. 1441," engraved, as many of our readers will remember, in Dugdale's "Warwickshire."

Of Mr. Newdegate's beautiful grounds, and his pleasant speech at the luncheon, we may not stop to speak.

Marche, marche, toujours! (as in *Le Juif Errant*) is ever the cry at the archaeological meetings. We once more take to the rail, and, before leaving for London, whisk our readers back to *Kemilworth*, that we may, in redemption of our promise, lay before them a representation of the interesting Norman doorway in the church there, engraved from a drawing made some years ago by the late W. Alexander, F.S.A.

In the course of these notes, which we have confined as closely as possible to matters connected with our architectural antiquities, we have not alluded to the visit of the Association to Stratford-on-Avon, and the steps that were there taken to insure the retention of Shakespeare's house. This was from no lukewarmness towards the proposal: we have long since and more than once expressed our strong feeling on the subject, and we suggested a plan for purchasing it, which has been very

* Vol. IV., p. 4.

† Many of these pictures, by the way, seem to require attention to ensure their preservation.

* See pages 387 and 378, ante.